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Packing For Mars: The Curious Science Of Life In The Void



Synopsis

Space is a world devoid of the things we need to live and thrive: air, gravity, hot showers, fresh produce, privacy, beer. Space exploration is in some ways an exploration of what it means to be human. How much can a person give up? How much weirdness can they take? What happens to you when you can't walk for a year? Have sex? Smell flowers? What happens if you vomit in your helmet during a space walk? Is it possible for the human body to survive a bailout at 17,000 miles per hour? To answer these questions, space agencies set up all manner of quizzical and startlingly bizarre space simulations. As Mary Roach discovers, it's possible to preview space without ever leaving Earth. From the space shuttle training toilet to a crash test of NASA's new space capsule (cadaver filling in for astronaut), Roach takes us on a surreally entertaining trip into the science of life in space and space on Earth.

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Customer Reviews

This is a relatively short, but highly educational and entertaining look at many of the aspects of space travel that you may have wondered about, but were never able to find the answer to. For example, does hygiene become an issue when two men are in a very tightly confined area for two weeks, wearing a space suit, without the ability to bathe? How are liquid and solid wastes captured and recycled or disposed of in a space flight? Sex in space? Motion sickness and the implications of regurgitating in a space helmet. The physics of a reentering space shuttle disintegrating at a speed of Mach 17. These questions and many others are covered in this whimsical little work. Good for

about six hours of entertainment, this will not win any literary awards, but if you have a sense of humor and a morbid curiosity, you'll find this a worthwhile read.

Topics were interesting but the writing style was dry and lackluster. Had to force myself to finish it after 2/3rds of the way through.

I've read every one of Mary Roach's books and, obviously, had to pick this one up as soon as it came out. I devoured it, to put it quite simply. Her witty anecdotes and off the wall analogies were as spot on as ever to create such a fun and educational story about traveling to space. Granted, she did lots of legwork and always ends up with good stories. She seems to be one of those people who is unafraid to tell it like it is no matter how embarrassing. From monkeys to poop, she makes space as unglamorous as it has ever been while at the same time creating the necessary background for the real truth behind space travel and all its messy necessities. Well worth a read for anyone who likes to think they know it all about space travel or even just the average reader who knows very little.

You don't have to be a science nerd to enjoy this book about NASA and the space program. I admit I'm a geek and I love this stuff but this really is a book for all audiences. A few years ago when I saw Mary Roach on John Stewart's Daily Show talking about her (at the time) new book, *Packing for Mars*, she was so entertaining and funny that I thought I've got to read this book. The book is not about Mars. I kept wondering when we were going to get to Mars. A few chapters in it hit me, the title is just a metaphor for what needs to be done to get into space. And boy do we find out. The author spent hours pouring through old flight transcripts, interviewing astronauts and NASA personnel and even going for a ride into weightlessness on the Vomit Comet, a low orbital flight that provides a nearly weightless environment in which to train astronauts and conduct research. The result is a hilarious look at the training and research for space travel. She asks the questions that you want to know the answers to but won't find in any Science magazine or NASA publication. Each chapter explores a different aspect of planning for space going back to the earliest mission through today on the International Space Station. Want to know how that space station toilet works and how they designed and tested it? Ummm, the training toilet has a camera in it. And bathroom breaks need to be scheduled because there's no gravity and therefore no urge! And what did they do for a toilet on the Apollo and earlier missions and how bad did that space capsule smell after two weeks? Is it possible to have sex in space? Which foods can be brought on board and why are crumbs

bad? It's not all bathroom jokes, there are also serious topics such as how astronauts are chosen for the program, a discussion of the psychological studies on long periods of isolation and the effects of weightlessness on the health of the astronauts. She also relates some strange but true stories and debunks a few well known myths. Interesting, informative and laugh-out-loud funny this is a book I highly recommend.

I love Mary's books and this one is my favorite so far! I was so bummed out once it was over! I wanted so much more. I laughed so hard I learned so much! I'm telling everyone to read this!

Mary Roach is probably my favorite author, so my review may be biased. But it was this book that put her over the edge and made her my favorite. It is packed full of great stories from space and the brilliant men and women who help build all of the crazy things that it takes to get people to space. It's funny and smart and will definitely give you interesting little trivia to use at the watercooler/cocktail party. A great read for science/space geeks and for people just looking for an interesting and entertaining read.

In *Packing for Mars*, Mary Roach takes a look at the less heroic aspects of manned space flight, considering such topics as what happens to shed skin particles when an astronaut doesn't bathe for weeks, the hazards of vomiting in one's helmet during a space walk, and, most memorably, the logistics of zero-gravity defecation. Some of the topics covered are less interesting than these--a history of chimps in space, for example, and simulated Martian traverses on Canada's Devon Island. That's all well and good, but most readers are likely to forget about simian heroics pretty quickly and leave the book instead with a healthy appreciation of gravity-fed toilets. Roach certainly has an eye for arresting topics--her *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* was fantastic (my review)--and she writes well about them. The only problem I had this time out is that her narrative is slowed by the constant introductions of interviewees. A lot of people are thrown at us, their names and positions, and eventually I just stopped paying attention to who any of them were. I suppose if you're structuring the book as she has, describing the interview process, there's no way of getting around the intros, but perhaps it could be structured differently to avoid their becoming tedious.--
Debra Hamel

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